DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 400 861 IR 056 176

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TITLE Teachers as Readers/Students as Readers.
PUB DATE 96
NOTE 6p.; In: Sustaining the Vision. Selected Papers from the Annual Conference of the International Association of School Librarianship (24th, Worcester, England, July 17-21, 1995); see IR 056 149.
PUB TYPE Reports - Descriptive (141) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Communication (Thought Transfer); Elementary Secondary Education; Fiction; *Grants; *Group Discussion; Librarians; Lifelong Learning; *Program Development; Reading Habits; *Reading Interests; Reading Materials; *Recreational Reading; Role Models; Strategic Planning; *Student Interests; Student Motivation; Teacher Role

ABSTRACT

The teacher and the librarian are key role models for students establishing reading habits. This paper describes various grant application projects developed in the Little Rock Public School District (Arkansas) to promote reading for pleasure by students and teachers. Discussion includes: student evaluation; developing a communication network of professionals with which to discuss fiction books; collection development; focusing on teachers who read and encourage students to become lifelong readers; a staff development class; book discussions which helped in the selection of books for the grant purchase; a grant application for multicultural materials; and challenges to implementation. In evaluating the need to continue book discussion groups with teacher and library media specialists and students throughout the school district, it was examined whether the book discussion group: (1) increased the number of books people read for pleasure; (2) encouraged book discussions; (3) encouraged the selection of quality fiction; (4) encouraged people to suggest titles to others; (5) encouraged people to suggest an author's works with reasons for the suggestion; (6) increased reading for understanding; (7) increased class participation for reading assignments; (8) enhanced vocabulary; (9) increased class participation for reading assignments; (10) increased empathy for characters; (11) built communication in the discussion groups; and (12) lead to lifelong learning. Four years of field testing book discussion groups for students and/or educators experiences illustrate that the groups enhance the love of reading and lifelong learning. (AEF)

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ED 400 861

Teachers as Readers/Students as Readers

by
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Literacy and lifelong learning are desirable goals; however, the love of reading needs to be a companion goal, or perhaps it is a prerequisite goal. The teacher and the librarian are key role models for students establishing reading habits. Educators acknowledge the need for teachers to read both professionally and for pleasure; however, studies show that educators do not read as much as they feel they should professionally, and they feel guilty reading for pleasure.

Theory must be placed into action to obtain objectives even if the major desired result is enjoyment of reading. Motivated by the desire to obtain funds for current, quality fiction when I felt compelled to spend the entire budget on reference sources, periodicals, and electronic sources to use for the demand of research across the curriculum, I applied for a $500 grant in the spring of 1991. This was the first application period for the Pulaski County Special School District Foundation Grants, the local school district grant for which any educator, department, or school could apply. Although I envisioned an ongoing project, I did not envision the granting of six more grants to promote love of reading.

Reading Cliques was funded based on two objectives.

> to promote reading for pleasure among high school students
> to promote reading as a lifelong leisure skill

The program description was very simple

> Current, popular, well written fiction for secondary students will be purchased and publicized through displays, announcements, special reading events, and peer reviews. From popular well written fiction students will expand reading to other areas of pleasure and/or need. The regular budget never reaches to include materials just for pleasure reading; it covers the reference materials, periodicals in print and microfiche, non- fiction, audio-visual materials, and only a very few fiction books.

The method of evaluation was very concise -- Students will increase the number of books which they read for pleasure.

Activities for each month were listed along with a projected buying guide, and the target number of students was the entire 850 students in the school.

When the grant was awarded I received several unexpected results. As I worked with teachers in my building and both school and public librarians, I discovered very little communication among secondary people regarding fiction books or reading for pleasure. I usually received a hurried reference to a "best of" list or something currently reviewed in a periodical. I realized that I personally needed a network of professionals with which to discuss fiction books. A process began which would develop over several years.

The "Reading Cliques" grant promoted fiction books and began, but did not achieve the desired results in one year. I realized that I had written the grant so that I did the promoting and the working with students. For the best effects I needed to involve the teachers as well as the students.

In the spring of 1992 I wanted to continue promoting reading for pleasure; however, since I was applying to the same school district Foundation Fund, I needed a different approach to achieve the funding. In working with teachers closely for all types of research projects, I decided to apply for a $500 grant for the "Opposing Viewpoints: Great Mystery Series." Students of all ability and several teachers could use these for additional projects. This grant surpassed my expectations. Both students and teachers enjoyed the material as pleasure reading in addition to

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the class projects I had in mind when applying for the grant. These books are still in demand although class projects have changed, and the co-operating teachers no longer work at my school.

This successful grant led to the desire for mythology books and the one of three 1993 grants *Mythology of Many Cultures*. Although the $1000 grant was written for two classroom activities, teachers and students read through the series *Monsters of Mythology* and *Library of the World's Myths and Legends* in addition to individual titles.

I needed more new fiction in the collection as promoting pleasure reading was being successful. Based on my experiences with "Reading Cliques," I wanted teachers involved with motivating students to read fiction for pleasure. I had just written the grant and was looking for a unique title when I discovered an article in *School Library Journal* about the Teachers as Readers Project which began in Virginia. "Teachers as Readers/Students as Readers" became the focus of a grant which was awarded for $500. As competition for the Foundation grants was increasing every year, I covered more areas with the objectives. I also wrote it as if it were more classroom centered rather than a library media center activity.

The objectives were:

- Teachers will encourage students to become lifelong readers.
- Teachers will model lifelong reading pleasure.
- Teachers will share quality literature with colleagues.
- Teachers will gain experience and confidence with book discussions.
- Teachers will enhance teaching and learning through reading experiences.

The grant description centered around the classroom and the teacher:

The Teachers as Readers Project endorsed by American Library Association, International Reading Association, Association of American Publishers, National Council of Teachers of English, and a growing number of other professional organizations focuses on teachers who read encouraging students to become lifelong readers. When teachers read and enjoy quality literature with confidence, they contribute to the rich, literature environment of classrooms. This grant will fund new quality fiction materials in addition to what is available in the local school which can be used by all levels of students. This project is essential as the Pulaski County Special School district embraces whole language approach to learning which will impact both elementary and secondary students. Teachers must be familiar with and be willing to be familiar with the literature they use with students, not just the material in textbooks or a title. Students must be confident that teachers read.

Approximately 10 teachers will meet to discuss books they read. The group may all read the same book or several different books for a discussion. As they meet a minimum of once each month, they will also discuss literature informally in the lounge or around school.

The grant recipient will organize the group and co-ordinate ordering books. The grant will be the only source of funds to purchase quality lifelong reading for students and teachers as regular budget must support the curriculum demands..

I tried to make the evaluation different from previous grants.

Evaluation will be based on the involvement of the teachers in the reading group, their influence in motivating their students to read more fiction books for pleasure, motivating students to read more for class needs, and perhaps the development of more than one book discussion group or the continuation of the group for more than one year.

The grant recipient will share success of the reading roup with other teachers in the school and with other schools in the district.

Fortunately the grant was awarded. I had also designed a staff development class based

on similar objectives as the grant. At the time I did not realize that the grant's success depended greatly on the success of the staff development class. Any teacher or administrator in the school district could take the forty-vive clock hour staff development class for three hours academic credit which counted in the pay scale. An excellent mixture of fourteen teachers enrolled - seven teachers from my building, one elementary teacher, one high school science teacher, two junior high teachers, and three library media specialists representing elementary, junior high, and high school. From the viewpoint of the group facilitator, this was a perfect group for all discussions. Everyone brought a unique aspect to the group. Participants read ten books, five professional articles, presented one book talk, one book promotional idea, and one book project or lesson plan.

Class participation far exceeded the requirements. Teachers frequently read a book someone had shared with the group added comments at a later meeting. Although all the teachers were extremely busy with teaching, extra curricular activities, committees, family obligations, and perhaps another class they all read more than the required amount. As with any group of dedicated teachers, we arrived feeling exhausted, but we left feeling refreshed. At the end of the staff development class I registered our book discussion group as a Teachers as Readers Group. We continued to meet monthly, and people would bring friends. I hope for other schools to form and register groups. This year the teachers in my school asked to continue the Teachers as Readers Group, which in April 1995 the national organization combined with the Parents as Readers Project and the Family Reading Night Project to form Reading Together, Inc.

I wanted people to feel that they were part of a special discussion group each session, so I looked for rituals which would be inclusive. Simply making a discussion square of the rectangular tables in the middle of the room each session included everyone as a group. It also announced to all the people walking through the library media center at the end of the day that a special group was meeting. The teapot and china tea cups and saucers also became a part of the ritual for meeting. The official staff development class for the informal extended Teachers as Readers Group are the only times these two rituals are observed together.

The book discussions were not limited to the weekly meetings, they carried over to the teachers' lounge and to the classroom. Students checked out books which their teachers had read, and teachers read books which students found particularly interesting.

This group helped me select the books for the grant purchase; they were knowledgeable of the types of fiction which were needed for purchase, and they motivated their students to read the books. Teachers and students now take the selection of books for book reports as seriously as they take the selection of materials for in-depth research projects. Students frequently share what they read with other students and teachers.

This success grew into the grant applied for in the spring of 1994. I discovered that little documentation is made of secondary school literature discussion which is not teacher controlled. Since our students are proficient in student team learning groups, "Literature Circles: Reading is Not a Spectator Sport" seemed a natural grant.

Grant objectives included several learning objectives.

- Students will read, analyze, discuss, and complete projects from multicultural short stories and fiction books.
- Students will work in literature, circles (student team learning) using Junior Great Book discussion techniques.
- Students will acquire an appreciation for and understanding of literature from and about different cultures.

The grant description reflected the objectives:

> Students must develop an understanding of the full spectrum of our human community. An ideal way to expose students to human diversity is through literature and activities which promote respect for racial, ethnic, cultural, and religious differences. "To know a country and its people, know its literature" is an applicable idea as fiction often reflects the personal experiences of authors representing many heritages and brings an emotional reality which non-fiction sometimes omits. Although many excellent titles are currently available for student use, new titles are available more quickly than budget allows for purchase. Twenty-five additional (individual titles,

not classroom sets, of short story collections and fiction books will make the literature circles of learning possible throughout the school year for several classes to replicate the activities of the grant recipient rather than a one time event for one teacher's classes.

Students will read, analyze, research background information, and develop projects for sharing with other students. Their discussion groups will be about content, methods of multicultural portrayal, human diversity, tolerance, etc.

A lesson plan, methods of implementing the program, and a reading list of material used will be distributed to all schools in the district.

Evaluation methods were achievable:

Students' classroom participation, completion of projects, grades on projects, and reading of more than required assignments will be indicators of success. Participation in two publicized school wide lunch time literature discussion groups will be another indicator.

Although this year's grant built on activities continuing from 1991, several challenges to implementation occurred. The two key teachers targeted to help implement the grant transferred to other schools, the fall staff development literary discussion class did not have the required number of teachers to form a class, and the spring staff development literary discussion class did not contain any teachers from my building. In spite of these minor problems we have been successful with the "Literature Circles." I plan for these literary discussion groups to evolve into conflict resolution through literature which is the theme for next year's grant.

The goal of teaching students the enjoyment of leisure reading and lifelong learning builds a type of rapport with students and teachers which is not achieved through all the worthy research projects. As I evaluate the need to continue book discussion groups with teacher and library media specialists throughout my school district and with students I developed the following questions. Does the book discussion group:

1. Increase the number of books people read for pleasure?
2. Encourage people to fulfil the need to discuss books?
3. Encourage people to select quality fiction?
4. Encourage people to suggest titles to others?
5. Encourage people to suggest an author's works with reasons for the suggestion?
6. Increase reading for understanding?
7. Increase class participation for reading assignments?
8. Enhance vocabulary?
9. Increase class participation for reading assignments?
10. Increase empathy for characters?
11. Build communication between people in the discussion group?
12. Lead to lifelong learning?

Four years of field testing book discussion groups for students and/or educators experiences illustrate the groups lead to enhancing the love of reading and lifelong learning.

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